Bitesized Belonging: Defining, Understanding, and Mitigating Microaggressions
Understanding language and communication are important components of business means accepting that we might not always get it right. Sometimes, especially during difficult conversations, we can offend someone without ever realizing we've done so. Often this is because of unconscious biases and a lack of self-education.

These microaggressions are "statements, actions, or incidents regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a [historically underrepresented] group..." (Dictionary.com). Despite their name, microaggressions can feel anything but 'micro' to those on the receiving end. In fact, microaggressions are a serious impetus to an inclusive and equitable culture.

Consider this example:
Edith Cooper, the board member and CEO of Medley, was told by a white, male colleague "There's no chance now [for a board seat] for the next 20 years. All they want are women. Edith, you must be in great demand--as a Black woman." (New York Times)

This is an example of a **competency microaggression**. These types of comments reveal that the aggressor, whether consciously or otherwise, believes the person's value lies solely in their identity and not in their work. While there are many different categories for microaggressions—including demographically specific examples and definitions—it's less important to know how a microaggression is defined and vastly more important understanding how we can prevent them.

Three Steps to Check Your Microaggressions
- **Focus on Inclusive Language**
- **Consider Your Questions:** Certain questions can be a vehicle for microaggressions. Consider why you're asking someone a question, the context, and whether research would be a better idea. *Ex. Rather than asking an openly queer/LGBTQ+ employee about their sexual identity, start with some independent research.*
- **Think Though What're You Implying:** Statements like "wow, you're so well-spoken!" might seem harmless and even uplifting but are historically considered a microaggression for many demographics, especially Women of Color. In this case, many employees feel comments like this have the potential to imply that people of color can't be, or aren't already, "well-spoken".

More Practice:
What are some ways you can educate yourself on microaggressions? What are some ways you can educate and support others?

Resources:
10-15 min. read: Business Insider: What is a microaggression?
7-8 min. read: Culture Amp: Microaggressions at work: Recognizing & overcoming our

biases

9 min. video: Eliminating Microaggressions: The Next Level of Inclusion